

HAMMET

ACHMET

BY

EMILIE T. STEDMAN

MIDDLETOWN, CONN.



HAMMET ACHMET



A SERVANT OF GEORGE WASHINGTON



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HAMMET ACHMET.

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**T**HERE lies before me a bundle of old papers, all bearing the quaint autograph "HAMMET ACHMET." Who was he? I have consulted the various records, and talked with the oldest inhabitant, and this is what I have learned.

Years ago in Middletown, Conn., there lived an aged colored man; he was very short and thick-set, very black, with sooty wool, which long manipulation had converted into pipe-stem curls, which waved about his face in the most comical way imaginable. He had been a servant of General Washington. At first as a little boy, holding the General's horse, then waiter—for many long stories he could tell of the fine dinners and grand company in "Massa Washington's mansion."

Later on, a "drummer in the war," presumably the War of the Revolution. At any rate, he had a pension, which "Massa B." (Jonathan Barnes), as Hammet called my grandfather (a lawyer, *sans peur*

### Hammet Achmet.

*et sans reproche*), took charge of for the old negro, and paid Hammet as per order. Achmet could not read, but his autograph, "Hammet Achmet," preceded by a pencil sketch of himself, or wife, as bearer of said order, was unique indeed. He always drew a circle to represent a dollar, or two circles for two dollars. The orders rarely amounted to more money at one time. One order is dated September 15th, 1839.

Hammet was undoubtedly a servant of Washington, and had in his possession a tiny silver box, shaped like a coffin, inclosed in a wooden case of similar shape. This contained a lock of General Washington's hair. This box and a rapier, or small dress sword, gold handled, and engraved with the initials of its former owner, were among the souvenirs of his service in "Massa Washington's family."

These relics were buried with Hammet. Whether they rest unmolested, I know not. The poor man feared they would rob him of his treasures so carefully guarded during his long life. I trust his rest was not disturbed. A harmless, kind old man he was. A waistcoat of flowered silk which "the General" had worn, Hammet showed to his friends with due reverence; but never wore it himself, for notwithstanding the added glory it would have given his costume, it was sacred to Washington. Dressed







in quaint regimentals—dark blue, with red stripes, and gay epaulettes, he drummed for the “vendue,” or auction. Musicians said “there was real music in old Achmet’s drum.”

Once some roguish boys persuaded him to don his suit, and decorating his hat with a card bearing some ridiculous inscription, they sent him out with his drum on Main street one Sunday morning. Hammet mistrusted all was not right, and said he would first ask “Massa B.” if he ought to drum on Sunday.

Grandfather was returning with his wife and children from the Old North Church, and they were greatly astonished at the sight of Hammet standing sentinel before their house. He had not struck his drum, and it needed but one word from “Massa B.” to assure him that the Sabbath should not be broken by a call to the “vendue.” Hammet made drums and sold them—most excellent drums they were, I have been told—and he might often have been seen walking through the streets with a string of little drums over one shoulder.

His cottage door bore the inscription: “Drums, large and small, made and sold by General Washington’s waiter.” Hammet also collected old shoes, and took them to Nathan Starr’s gun factory, where they “were burned to polish guns.”

We have a toy which Hammet made for one of "Massa B.'s" little daughters—a "Jacob's ladder," he called it. It is made of strips of wood and leather, and folds and unfolds an infinite number of times. It is inscribed all over with hieroglyphics.

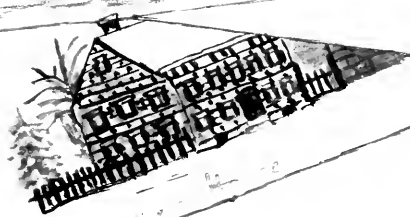
One time when grandfather was attending court in New Haven, a man came to the B—— residence and inquired for grandfather. The eldest daughter opened the door, and the man informed the child that he was Phineas T. Barnum, and that he was trying to get Hammet Achmet to travel with his "Greatest Show on Earth."

P. T. Barnum had at that time negotiated for Joyce Heth, a servant woman employed by Washington.

Hammet had refused to go unless "Massa B." should say he must. Not finding it possible to persuade old Achmet, and Lawyer B. not being at home, Barnum hired a horse and carriage (there was no railroad to New Haven then, and the stage went there only every other day), and drove to New Haven to interview "Massa B." Grandfather said he would advise with Hammet, the result being that "General Washington's waiter" concluded he did not want to be exhibited as one of Barnum's curiosities, and remained at home.



Steel - 1936





The kindness and Christian courtesy which grandfather always showed toward everyone won the extremest devotion of poor Hammet, and "Massa B.," that noble man, whom the highest education had not made haughty or indifferent to the lowly ones of earth, was almost worshiped, I might say, by old Achmet.

Hammet's first wife, named Jane, was buried in the old northwestern part of Mortimer cemetery, and now houses are built over the spot where once stood a wooden slab painted dazzling white, and inscribed: "Jane Achmet," by Hammet's own hands. This slab he considered quite like marble.

Mrs. Achmet second was not a "colored lady," as the first was,—but as mixed marriages were not in favor, the young bride (she was very much Hammet's junior, in fact his first wife and he had befriended her, and educated her after their fashion,) washed her face and hands in a decoction of mahogany chips, and went to the Methodist parsonage, and married "George Washington's waiter." The dye lasted a long time—perhaps she renewed it occasionally. At any rate, she remained a colored woman until Hammet's death, and then, being wooed by an old sailor and bird fancier, named Folio, she became white, and married him! Folio's house was still standing within my recollection, but

nothing now remains, I think, even of the old-fashioned brick chimney which remained long after the house was destroyed.

Wild strawberries grow in Hammet's garden, and mild-eyed cows wander where the home of the odd couple used to be.

Mr. and Mrs. Achmet quarrelled sometimes, and once she cut off Hammet's ringlets as he lay asleep. They were his especial pride, and as a Chinaman feels insulted to the death at any abbreviation of his queue, so poor Achmet hid himself till the curls grew again. Hammet had a garden which was very productive, although he never "dug it over" or "ploughed it in," merely punching holes in the hard earth with a sharp stick, and laying the corn and potatoes therein.

A favorite custom of his was to walk through the town, and meeting one and another, to tell his dreams. "Massa Hosmer," he would say to the stately Judge, "I dreamed you gave me a shilling." Of course the dream would be realized. Once some one said to him: "Dreams go by contraries, Hammet." He quickly replied: "Oh, Massa, I dreamed again you didn't give me any." Meeting a troop of merry boys, Hammet would say: "John, I dreamed you gave me a penny." The boys were kind to him.







One of those boys has said that such a strange figure as the old negro's would hardly escape mobbing now-a-days in our streets, but *then* the boys had not the modern notion that it was so "smart" to molest and terrify the weaker brethren. In the rush of busy life we hardly heed the warning: "If ye offend one of these little ones."

Hammet was said to be one hundred and fourteen years old when he died.

Only one of the servants of the great General, and only one of the great number who have passed beyond the river to the "Better Land," for Hammet, with all his ignorance, knew the way to the life everlasting, and "Massa B." no doubt talked with him about the Lord Jesus Christ, whose service true soldiers may enter, and whose reward is: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

Hammet Achmet was granted a pension in the Connecticut line of troops, and received fourteen or fifteen hundred dollars as pension before 1839.

Hammet Achmet.*( From J. Barnes's Ledger. )*

Last payment made Hammet Achmet, \$1.00, Nov. 18th, 1842.

Hammet died Nov. 19th, 1842.

Nov. 29th, 1842.

*Mary A. Achmet, Dr.:*

|                                                    |         |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------|
| To cash paid court of probate, - - - - -           | \$2.00  |
| Postage on letters to and from Hartford, - - - - - | .30     |
| Cash paid to clerk in Hartford, - - - - -          | .38     |
| My fees (J. Barnes), - - - - -                     | 1.00    |
| John B. Southmayd's bill, undertaking, - - - - -   | 6.00    |
| William B. Casey's bill, M. D., - - - - -          | 2.37    |
| Wm. S. Camp & Co.'s bill, - - - - -                | 1.02    |
| Samuel Bridgeman's bill, - - - - -                 | 3.00    |
| Zar Bunnet's bill, - - - - -                       | .75     |
| Cash, - - - - -                                    | 3.69    |
|                                                    | <hr/>   |
|                                                    | \$20.51 |

Rec'd and approved

in presence of

GERARD SICKLES.

*Her*

MARY ANN X ACHMET.

*Mark.*







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